Fishing

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226 Near rivers, swamps, and lakes, fishing is one of the principal occupations of the native.

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[462] Unlike hunting which is practiced only by men, fishing is done by both men and women. The latter, however, practice it only occasionally and fish only by damming up part of a river bed or marsh. The dam is usually built during the rainy season, but as long as the water is rising, the women leave all the sluices wide open. Toward the end of the rainy season, they narrow the drain channels and set large traps before the openings. These traps
M are attached to strong wooden stakes on the shore near the dam.
226 The traps are made of splints from the ribs of raffia leaves and
285 are plaited in openwork with the open spaces varying in size. The exterior form is always the same. Cylindrical at one end [85] and the other end closed along the diameter, the trap resembles a large cone ending in a line at the top. These traps

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Fig. 52. Making a Fish Trap among the Wadia and Tumba.

are built over a framework made of two, three, or four hoops. Their diameters vary according to their positions. They are set inside the trap, the largest one at the base, the smallest one toward the upper end. The transverse elements, doubled and woven alternately in and out, are spaced 10 to 15 centimeters apart and are usually made of strips of rattan. The inner trap, or entry trap, is plaited in the shape of a broad fan, conical

in form, with an ellipsoidal base. The open top is the entrance hole. The ends of the splints overlap somewhat on the inside in order to prevent the trapped fish from retracing their paths and escaping.

These traps are made only by men. When the plaiting is done, the work is flat, and then the finished latticework is fastened to the frame.

The trap is opened by detaching the binding that closes the top. As the waters recede, a woman lowers the trap. Morning and evening she comes to inspect it and to gather the captured fish. [86]

When the waters have fully subsided, the women assemble and go up the river or into the swamp. Standing across the full width of the watercourse, they walk down, chasing before them the fish that remained in the dammed-off area. They make an ear-

Fig. 53. Fish Traps used by the Peoples of Lake Leopold II.

shattering din, slapping the water with broad sticks or churning it with arms and legs. The hunted and terrified fish flee wildly only to be caught eventually in the trap. If they try to break through the line of women, the latter do not hesitate to grab and fling them on the bank. [Ed., the text is not translated from the second paragraph, page 86, to the second paragraph, page 87.]

Yaelima

●226 [87] After the drive through the dammed-off area, there are usually several fish remaining that succeeded in slipping through the chain. The women then take baskets and bail the pool dry, throwing the water over the dam.

Very often the women dam up part of a marsh or stream and bail out the water with baskets without setting traps or waiting for the water level to go down.

In all three cases we find: 1) setting the trap in front of the drain channel; 2) the drive in the dammed-up area; and 3) bailing out this section. The catch is divided equally among the women who participated in the work. [88]

These three methods of fishing prevail among all the riparian peoples of the Congo, Kasai, Fimi, Lake Leopold II, and the lower Lukenie.

On the upper Lukenie, starting with the Oshwe sector, no traps are made. At most the women occasionally dam up a section of the rivers and streams of the interior and bail them out with baskets to catch the fish.

226 184 The Ipanga, Batitu, Bokala, and Yaelima do not fish at all. They are people of the forest and not of the water. Hunting is their chief occupation, and fishing is unknown to them.

In this connection, these tribes are wholly distinct from their neighbors to the west. It must be noted, however, that even among the latter all the clans do not engage in fishing. The groups of the interior do not fish any more than their brothers of the sector of Oshwe and Bumbuli. The traps and other contrivances which we shall discuss below are unknown to both groups. In this respect, all these peoples have a common characteristic, recalling their common origin. In the lower Lukenie and farther west, however, part of the population, the Bandzali, "people of the water," have adapted themselves to the new conditions of their environment. The river became for them a source of wealth and well-being, and a part of their social activity was oriented toward the exploitation of this precious resource.

226 258 At the present time fishing and the preparation of salt are practically the only means of subsistence and unquestionably the principal occupations of all the riparian groups in the region of Leopoldville, Kwamouth, Lake Leopold II, and the lower Lukenie.

226 Among all the tribes of this region, we were able to distinguish
258 clearly between the groups of the interior, whose chief occupation is hunting, and the riparian groups who prefer to fish and make salt.

Two clans arose in this fashion within a single ethnic group. They both belong to the large family known by the name of the tribe, and yet they are completely different in the habits, practices, and customs relating to that aspect of their lives.

226 During the dry season, one sees the natives from villages located two or three hours' march into the interior come to establish camps on the [89] river bank and to set up veritable fisheries. The information that follows applies to these groups and to all the peoples from Leopoldville to the sector of Tolo inclusively. The rivers, lakes, and marshes in this region are extremely well stocked with fish. As a matter of interest, we give here the list of some native names for fish noted by Mr. Bayens and used by the Bandzali of the Tolo region: kinkure mbieme, lepari, ignognienge, mpushu, lokanga, itike, mokonga, n'sombo, loana, sabere, lboie, moelo, n'ikulu, m'binga, pesule, m'butu, mondja, mshime, moekiki, lupungu, ompara, m'vunu, longelenzali, monkie, komoe, ikeke, koshoie, nokama, singa, n'guikemen, m'pio, mwiki, ekambela, lekumu, elangu, evuya, mekamo, m'beli, motume, idzore, kebaie, kupu, mokeja, kevuni, mopa lekeje, mipari.

Aside from fishing with dams, these different groups fish both individually and communally.

Individual fishing is done by the following methods.

1) Fishing with hook and line, angling. The hook is made of a very fine splint of false bamboo, folded back and held in the shape of a hook by a fine raffia fiber. This raffia fiber extends on to form the fishing line. It is attached to a splint of bamboo which serves as a float. The native does not keep watch over his line. He fastens the lines with the hooks on them to a rope of twisted fibers. The lines are spaced 30 to 50 centimeters apart. The rope is 10 to 15 meters long and is attached to a stick at either end. The native plants two stakes in the river bed. He attaches the two ends of the rope to them, taking care that it is stretched perpendicularly to the current. The lines with float and hook are uncoiled, the bait consisting of a pellet of

● 226 chikwangue [Ed., manioc cake] or an earthworm is fastened to the hook, and everything is thrown into the water. Under the pressure of the current, the lines are drawn out and lie parallel to each other, held at one end by the large rope stretched over the water. A fish, attracted by the bait, seizes it and swallows it along with the hook, which remains in the stomach. All its efforts to free itself merely hooks the fish more securely. The native inspects the rope four

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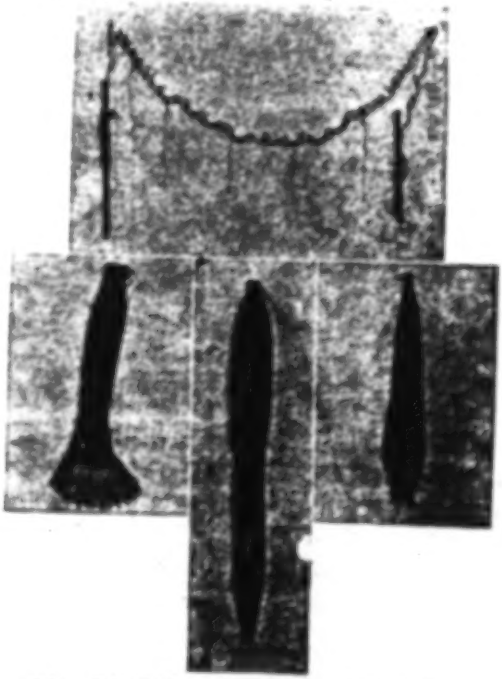

Fig. 54. Fish Traps and Lines, Lake Leopold II.

or five times during the day and pulls in the lines one by one. The hooked fish is cut loose by severing the string from the hook; it is gutted and thrown into the canoe. [90] The hook is replaced with one held in reserve until the first one is recovered while cleaning the catch.

The native also fishes with a line on the bottom and an inert line without a float. The hook is larger and usually made of iron. The strong rope is coated with oil to make

● 226 it more durable. The bait, consisting of a piece of chikwangue, entirely covers the hook. The line is thrown into the water, weighted with stones, and attached to a stake on the bank. The native pulls in these lines only in the morning and at night. They are used only for large fish.

2) Fishing with bow and arrow. This is a method of fishing at which the natives excel. During the hot hours of the day, they settle themselves comfortably in their canoe among the grasses and wait patiently for a large fish to wander up to the surface of the water. Immediately, they bend the bow and shoot the arrow. They are fine shots and rarely miss their target. The fish is usually run through and impaled on the arrow. Hampered in its movements, it vainly tries to dive. The native puts down his bow, judges his spring, dives, grabs the fish, and climbs back into his canoe. [91]

3) Harpoon fishing is practiced especially for capturing fish that live in the mud. The native takes to this with real passion. Standing in his canoe, he lets himself be carried along by the current, advancing slowly so that no disturbance of the water will scare the fish. With a slow, regular, methodical motion, he plunges in his harpoon, guided by chance and his instinct. The jerks made by the harpooned fish trying to escape alert the experienced fisherman to his catch. He immediately increases the pressure, and then with a slow, regular, methodical motion he pulls up the harpoon, avoiding any abrupt motion that might detach the prize.

[411] The fishing harpoon is made of a bamboo shaft about 2.50 meters long onto which four wooden prongs are attached with bonds of rattan splints. At the tip of each of these four prongs is fastened an iron point which has four barbs and terminates in a conical socket.

4) Fishing with a trap placed at random in the grass of marshy banks. [92] The traps, made of rattan splints and with an opening that has spikes pointed toward the interior, vary in size, but they are all made by the same technique. The native puts bait inside and submerges the whole trap in the water. The fish, attracted by the bait, try to get it and enter the trap through the opening set on its side. This entrance, easy to negotiate from

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the outside, bristles with spikes pointed toward the interior, which prevent the fish from leaving the trap. The shape of the traps for small fish is long, tubular, and narrow. They open at one end, and the entrance with spikes is set toward the middle of the trap. The traps for big fish have the shape of a truncated cone, with the top forming a straight line. The entrance, constructed on the same principle as that of the small traps, is set in the forward part, opening toward the interior. These traps are placed in front of the drain channels of dammed-up marshes and rivers.

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5) Fishing with a trap usually set in waters with a strong current. The trap is in the shape of a cone, its movable base serving as a lid and its tip extended by a strong, flexible strip of rattan which acts as a spring. A liana is attached to the end of the rattan. A free-swinging, trapeze-like apparatus is tied to the body of the trap. The bait is attached to a rattan splint inside the trap. This splint is tied to a small, mobile crossbar on

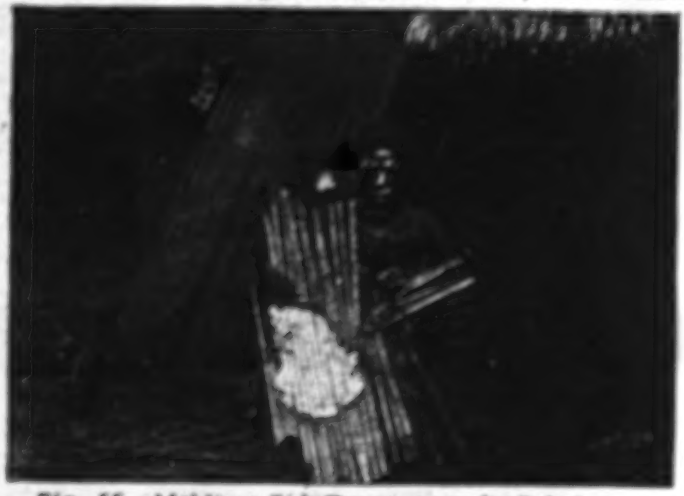

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Fig. 55. Making a Fish Trap among the Bobale.

the trapeze. The liana tied to the end of the rattan spring is drawn inside the trap through one of the openings near the supporting hoop of the entrance and is attached to the movable lid. The trap is constructed in such a way that when it is not set, the lid is closed by the pull of the rattan spring. To set the trap, the native ties toward the middle of the liana a rattan splint to which a small stick is attached. The end (A) of the latter passes behind

M 226 285 the bar of the trapeze, and the point (B) is caught behind the mobile crossbar (C). To the latter the native ties a rattan splint, at the end of which he fastens the bait. This consists of a palm nut still covered with pulp. To reach the bait, the fish enters the trap; it takes the bait, pulls on it, and dislodges the triggering

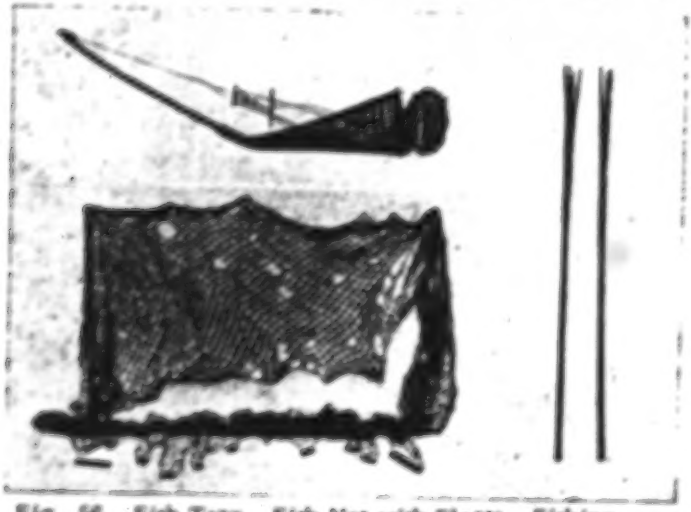

Fig. 56. Fish Trap. Fish Net with Floats. Fishing Harpoons from Lake Leopold II.

crossbar (C). The catches (A) and (B) are freed, the rattan spring is released, and the lid closes, trapping the fish. [93]

M 226 685 In individual fishing, the fish belong to the owner of the trap or to the person who set it. The native respects this right, and, moreover, custom punishes offenses very severely. Native law is rigorous to the point that a man caught red-handed in theft is liable to be driven from the community.

M 226 The yield from individual fishing is of hardly any importance. This kind of fishing is practiced only to vary the diet a little, and it is successful only because of the tremendous abundance of fish in these rivers.

M S 226 Communal fishing is much more productive. Certain tribes, or to be more exact, certain families among the peoples of the Fimi, Lake Leopold II, and the lower Lukenie make a veritable

SM 226 industry of it. This sort of thing flourishes especially among the riparian people in the country of the Basakata, Balesa, and Mosengere.

SM 226 361 In the region of the lower Fimi, as well as along the marshy banks of the lower Lulonga, native fishing camps are quite numerous. They are all of the same type and [94] never have the character of a permanent settlement. At the end of the rainy season one sees families of riparian peoples leave their villages temporarily and settle along the marshy rivers. Men and women make this move, while children, old people, and a few able-bodied adults stay in the village to guard the homes.

The fishing camps are set up in very rudimentary fashion. The huts are merely shelters, refuges.

SM [462] Gathering salt grass for making salt is the chief task of the women. The men do the fishing.

SM 226 All the methods for fishing individually are used, but the bulk of the work is done communally.

The procedures are quite varied. We will mention the following.

1) Damming the mouths of small rivers and minor tributaries, along with setting traps in front of the escape channel and the method of driving the fish described above.

SM [286 386] 2) Fishing with a net. Unlike the nets used for hunting, the fishing nets are made of raffia fibers. The type of knot is the same, but the technique is more like the one used for plaiting the hair. The native carefully dyes the fibers black in order to make the mesh invisible under water. He attaches small cylindrical sections of a very light wood to the upper part of the net to serve as floats. At the opposite edge, he attaches the sinkers, made of cylindrical pieces of baked clay. The floats and sinkers are made so that they counterbalance each other and maintain the net in a vertical position in the water. These nets are 20 to 25 meters long. If necessary, the natives use a series of nets and dam the whole river in this way. Five to ten men are stationed with large baskets along the nets. The women go up the river 100 to 200 meters, enter the water, and form a chain to drive the fish before them. These are caught in the meshes of the nets and attract the attention of the fishermen by the efforts they

S M 226 make to free themselves. The fishermen grab them and throw them in their baskets. [95]

Sometimes the natives enclose an area on the grassy banks, move into it, and search the grass for fish. If the fish try to break away for the main channel, they are caught in the meshes of the net.

3) Fishing with screens. This method is the most common. It is easier and more productive than the others. The screens are made of long splints of rattan or raffia, placed parallel to each other one or two centimeters apart. The cross elements of rattan are spaced from 20 to 30 centimeters apart. The height of the screens varies from 66 centimeters to 2.50 meters, and their length from 10 to 20 meters. These screens are used as dams in the river, marshes, coves, and at the mouths of small tributaries. They are fastened to stakes and sunk perpendicularly into the river bed. The natives set them up when the waters first begin to recede. A little upstream of the screens, they throw into the river a number of branches, still bearing their leaves, in such a fashion as to provide a shelter for the fish stopped by the screen. When the water is very low, the natives go a very great distance upstream. They enter the water, form a tight chain, and work methodically downstream toward the screen. All the fish are driven toward it. At 25 or 30 meters from the screen, the natives put another screen in the water. Some of the fishermen are assigned to hold it vertical. The others enter the enclosure formed by the two screens, take out the sheltering branches and grass, and begin to hunt the fish. They have openwork baskets shaped like a truncated cone. The fisherman, with the basket in front of him, sets it down on the river bed, the large opening toward the bottom. If a fish is trapped in the basket, the fisherman can tell by the light bumps against the sides caused by the fish trying to escape. The fisherman plunges his hand into the basket through the top opening, gropes about inside, seizes the fish, breaks its backbone, and throws it into the canoe or on the bank.

S M 251 The catch is carried to the temporary village, and the fish are gutted, cleaned, and thrown on the apparatus for smoking them. This is a [96] grid made with rattan of average thickness, which rests on crossbars placed on forked stakes planted in the ground.

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The average height is 1.25 meters, the width 2.50 meters, and the length five to ten meters. The women maintain a fire under this smoking-drying apparatus night and day. It is fed with grass and other rubbish, which are not very dry so that a great deal of smoke will be produced. All the fish are turned over twice a day. After eight to ten days the operation is finished. The dried, smoked fish are carefully wrapped after being sorted and graded according to size. Part of the fish will make up the family reserve, and the rest will be used as trade goods. When the grid

SM [226 285]

Fig. 57. Baskets for Fishing, Lake Leopold II.

is almost empty, the men go up the river and start fishing again.

SM 226

It is difficult to realize the magnitude of this industry and the unbelievable quantities of fish caught by the natives during their sojourn in the region of the salt grass. We watched one of these miraculous hauls one day, organized through the kind cooperation of Mr. Molin. The river had been dammed for only one night, the natives went up it only 150 [97] meters, this in the middle of the dry season, and yet they brought back four large baskets full of fish.

SM [B22]

The catch from communal fishing is shared at the end of the season. A part is reserved for the chief, the owners of the screens receive a special share, and the rest is divided among all the members of the group participating in the enterprise. [Ed., a

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paragraph beginning on page 97 and continued on page 98 is not translated.]

[98] On the whole, we note the following special ethnic characteristics.

1) Uniformity in the cultivation of manioc, the staple food of all of these peoples.

2) Undertaking the cultivation of maize under the influence

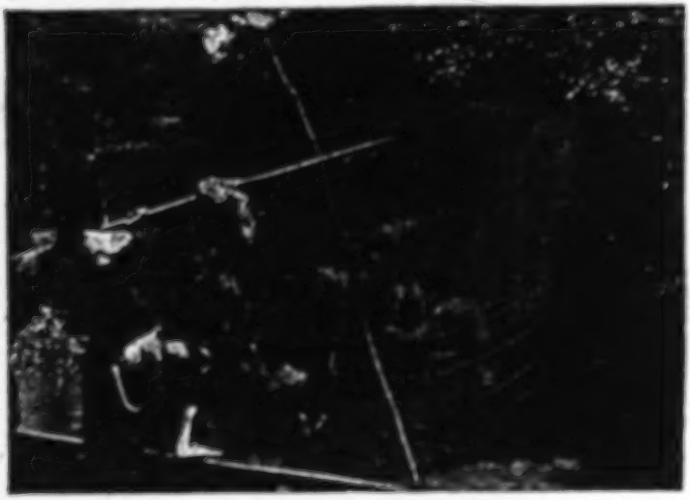

Fig. 58. Weir Fishing at a Dam among the Mosengere. Closing the Screens and Capturing the Trapped Fish.

of the ephemeral encouragement of Bula Matari [Ed., the European administration] among the peoples of the Congo-Kasai, and rice cultivation under Arab influence in the region of Bena Dibele-Kole. Contrary to what we noted concerning maize, the innovation introduced by the Arabs has become firmly implanted in the life of these natives, and the cultivation of rice will probably eliminate manioc eventually.

3) Formation of a zone of sugar-cane cultivation, the development of which is in inverse proportion to the extent of the palm groves.

4) Complete absence of animal husbandry of any importance.

5) Uniformity in the methods of communal hunting and the gradual development of attendant religious customs and practices from east to west, corresponding to a decline in hunting by individuals with traditional weapons. This fact leads us to suppose